



Protecting Worker Health

Reopening: Guidance for the **Retail** Industry

Guidance Document

[aiha.org](https://www.aiha.org)

Small and medium (especially non-chain) retail stores have been very challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these businesses have been viewed as “non-essential” by state governments and have been forced to strictly utilize online sales.

Some have been very creative with curbside drop off and utilization of video tools (FaceTime, Zoom, and Skype) to provide personal customer service. Many have been forced to lay off or furlough key staff members, which may complicate re-opening as states start to relax shelter-in-place and stay-at-home restrictions.

With such restrictions beginning to lift, retail owners are faced with difficult questions that must be addressed before reopening, such as:

- How can we protect our employees and customers from the disease while shopping at our store?
- How do we assure our customers that we are doing all we can to protect them from the disease?
- How can we minimize the risk of disease transmission if those that are ill or those who have had contact with positive COVID-19 people shop in our stores?
- What do we do if a customer is sick or not following guidelines?
- How do we deal with customers trying on clothing or footwear?
- How do we deal with returns?

Measures can be taken to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 from touching surfaces or from person-to-person spread through respiratory droplets. Clear communication and utilization of social and digital media to educate customers on controls implemented for their safety are critical, as shopping and spending habits have shifted to large online retailers and big box stores.

At this time, it is unknown if retail shopping will be sparse after stay-at-home restrictions are lifted, or if they will be flooded with people in need for retail therapy - personal contact, the ability to see, touch and try on items. In either case, the move towards a new normal is coming.

This document offers practical guidance for retail store owners to implement interim measures to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. It addresses the key questions above, and also provides tips for retail employees and customers.

What should an Employer do to protect themselves and their customers

Retail owners should continually monitor international (World Health Organization (WHO)), federal (CDC), state, and local guidelines for changes in recommendations, cleaning strategies, and other best management practices. Employers should also consider developing a team of professionals to monitor, assess, and implement new strategies as they become available. In addition, employers should consider the following strategies for reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in regards to physical distancing, ventilation, enhanced cleaning practices, restrooms, food preparation areas and contact surfaces, personal hygiene, employee wellness, personal protective equipment, training, waste and laundering, and communication. Due to the wide variety of retail store types, functions, and sizes, it may not be possible for establishments to implement *all* of the following, however, trying to tackle the problem from multiple angles can help reduce health risks.

Physical Distancing

- Encourage continued e-commerce and contactless curbside pick-up and in-home delivery.
- Use social media and other communication (signage/email/text lists) to educate customers/clients on the steps being taken for their protection.



- Crowd control: mark distances using tape/markers/paint/signage of 6 feet for customers in checkout and indoor and outdoor waiting areas.
 - Video, photos, and markings are ideal to demonstrate distancing measures.
 - Train sales personnel on physical distancing.
 - Make this a key point at greeting “Hello, thank you for coming in, we are here to help you, but we will be at distance of 6 feet for your safety”.
 - Limit the number of customers shopping at one time. Consider starting with a call/text ahead program to start and limiting the family unit/group size to two or less.
 - Encourage self check-out if available.
 - If store has aisles that are less than 10 ft in width, route traffic in one direction.
 - Develop merchandizing strategy with distancing in mind.
 - Distance racks/shelves to 6 feet or more if unidirectional shopping, greater than 10 ft if multidirectional shopping/traffic flow.
 - Consider single item display with back stock for specific color/sizing.
 - Close off all changing rooms temporarily.
 - Consider adjusting return policies to accommodate interim shopping restrictions.
 - Discourage customers from carrying around products they plan to purchase.
 - Encourage items to be placed in carts in large stores.
 - Identify an area near checkout where customers can place items they plan to purchase in small stores.
 - For returned items, it is recommended to disinfect or isolate the items as follows:
 - Isolate paper/cardboard materials for at least 24 hours.
 - Isolate all other materials for at least 3 days.
 - Visible store/brand specific messaging with distancing requirements.
 - Consider placing Plexiglass partitions between cashier clerks and customers.
 - Discourage customers from touching items they don't intend to purchase if absolutely necessary.
- ### Ventilation
- Get fresh air to the shoppers and staff and properly utilize ventilation system. Some ways to do this or seek help:
 - Encourage outdoor shopping, and open doors and windows if possible.
 - Maximize fresh air through your ventilation system.
 - Maintain relative humidity at 40-60%.
 - Ensure restroom is under negative pressure.
 - If you don't know how, ask an HVAC professional and see [ASHRAE](#) updates for more information.
 - Consider using portable HEPA filtration units.
 - If fans such as pedestal fans or hard mounted fans are used in the store, take steps to minimize air from fans blowing from one person directly at another individual. If fans are disabled or removed, employers should remain aware of, and take steps to prevent, [heat hazards](#).
- ### Enhanced Cleaning Practices
- Select appropriate disinfectants – consider effectiveness and safety.
 - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a list of products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2.
 - Review product labels and Safety Data Sheets and follow manufacturer specifications.
 - Consider consulting industrial hygiene experts if additional advice is needed.



- Establish a disinfection routine – do not use wet rag approach (use disposable products instead).
 - Ensure disinfection protocols follow product instructions for application and contact time.
 - Contact surfaces, point of purchase, credit card payment station should be disinfected after each customer.
 - Promote these practices to customers – make this visible.
 - As noted above, clean HVAC intakes daily.
 - Consider using a checklist or audit system to track how often cleaning is conducted.
 - Carts, racks, shelving, hangers, and other items on the sales should be visibly clean and consider marking them as “clean” or “disinfected”.

Restrooms

- Doors to multi-stall restrooms should be able to be opened and closed without touching handles if at all possible.
 - Place a trash can by the door if the door cannot be opened without touching the handle.
- For single restrooms, provide signage and materials (paper towels and trash cans) for individuals to use without touching the handles, and consider providing a key so disinfection measures can be better controlled.
- Place signs indicating that toilet lids (if present) should be closed before flushing.
- Place signs asking customer and employees to wash hands before and after using the restroom.
- Provide paper towels in restrooms and disconnect or tape-off hand air dryers.
- Double efforts to keep bathrooms clean and properly disinfected.

Personal Hygiene

- Establish a “before and after service” hand washing or sanitizing for all staff.

- Provide hand washing stations at the front of the establishment or alternatively, hand sanitizer if not feasible.
- Provide hand washing stations or sanitizer at prominent locations and point of purchase.

Employee Wellness

- Conduct employee temperature screening and wellness checks before each shift.
 - Temperature screening can include manual (use non-contact infrared thermometers) or thermal camera methods.
 - Employees can self-check temperature, while wearing a glove, or disinfect between use.
 - There are a number of examples available for wellness questionnaires (see Resources below).
- If employee is sick or receives any kind of testing (virus or antibody), results should be reported to employer and timing/decision to go back to work should only be with doctor’s approval.

Personal Protective Equipment

- Although not necessary if hand-washing protocols are rigorously followed, consider providing gloves to staff.
 - If they are worn, they must be changed regularly and are not a substitution for hand-washing.
- Consider face coverings for staff depending on local requirements and for those that cannot maintain physical distancing as part of their job.

Training

- Provide instruction and training to employees on how to:
 - Properly put on and remove gloves.
 - Clean and disinfect surfaces according to product specifications.
 - Correctly use face coverings and/or respirators.



- Provide Safety Data Sheets for cleaning chemicals and ensure employees are aware of the hazards of use.
- If advice is needed, industrial hygienists have expertise in selecting PPE and training.

Waste and Laundering

- Single-use items and used disinfection materials can be treated as regular waste, following regular safety guidelines.
- Any reused cloth materials should be washed and dried on the highest temperature setting allowable for the fabric.

Communication

- Communicate to customers what the retail establishment is doing to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
 - (e.g., disinfection routine, health policies for staff, and health & safety measures in place).
- Consider communicating to customers when in-person shopping may not be a good option (e.g. taking care of someone who is COVID-19 positive, exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, being in a high-risk category, etc.).
- Communicate that the retail establishment has the right to refuse service to anyone exhibiting symptoms or not following guidelines (e.g., physical distancing).
- Platforms for communication could include websites and indoor/outdoor signage.

What should an Employee do to protect themselves and the customer

- Evaluate your health constantly, if you are sick stay home. If you have a temperature stay home. If someone at home is sick, stay home. If you have allergies and sneezing, stay home.

- Wear mask when out in public and maintain physical distancing.
- Wash your hands when you arrive at work, after each customer, after touching your mask and when you leave work.
- Wear mask at work at all times (homemade, surgical, N95 when available).
 - If you own an N95 mask that was unable to be donated, it would provide the most protection for you and those around you.
- Let your employer know if you have concerns about the PPE that is being provided.
- Carry a towel, if you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose, mouth and mask, attempt to delay the urge to sneeze or cough, immediately leave the building, wash your hands and face thoroughly before going back to work.

What can a Customer do to minimize the transmission of Covid-19

- If you are sick stay home. If you have a temperature stay home. If someone in your house is sick, stay home. If you have allergies and can't control sneezing, stay home.
- Use online or curbside services where you can.
- Limit the items you touch within a store to the items you select to purchase.
- Wear a mask as you enter and leave the building.
- Wash your hands before and after you leave the building if possible. If not, use hand sanitizer when you enter and before you leave the building.
- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other customers and employees when walking throughout the store to the extent possible.
- If you get the urge to sneeze or cough, put on your mask, cover your nose, mouth, and mask with a napkin or handkerchief, attempt to delay the urge



to sneeze or cough, immediately leave the building, wash your hands and face thoroughly before returning.

Resources

- **Open for Business – A Blueprint for Shopping Safe** <https://rilastagemedia.blob.core.windows.net/rila-web/rila.web/media/media/pdfs/committee%20documents/coronavirus%20documents/final-reopen-retail-blueprint-rila-nrf.pdf>
- **Customer Survey on Post SARS-CoV-2 Shopping** - <https://www.footwearinsightextra.com/2020/april/22/consumers-speak-how-they-plan-to-shop-post-shutdown.html>
- **CDCs Guidelines:** What Grocery and Food Retail Workers Need to Know about COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/grocery-food-retail-workers.html>
- Numerous **wellness questionnaire examples** are available online (e.g., https://doh.sd.gov/documents/COVID19/BusinessScreening_Q&A.pdf)
- The EPA has developed a list of disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- **ASHRAE has a list of COVID resources for commercial buildings.** <https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources>
- AIHA's Indoor Environmental Quality Committee developed these guidance documents about reopening and cleaning buildings after closures due to COVID-19: https://aiha-assets.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/AIHA/resources/Public-Resources/RecoveringFromCOVID-19BuildingClosures_GuidanceDocument.FINAL.pdf and https://aiha-assets.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/AIHA/resources/Guidance-Documents/Workplace-Cleaning-for-COVID-19-Guidance-Documents_FINAL.pdf



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About Occupational Health and Safety Professionals

Occupational health and safety (OHS) professionals (also known as industrial hygienists) practice the science of anticipating, recognizing, evaluating,

and controlling workplace conditions that may cause workers' injury or illness. Through a continuous improvement cycle of planning, doing, checking and acting, OHS professionals make sure workplaces are healthy and safe.

Get additional resources at AIHA's Coronavirus Outbreak Resource Center.

https://www.aiha.org/public-resources/consumer-resources/coronavirus_outbreak_resources

Find a qualified industrial hygiene and OEHS professionals near you in our Consultants Listing. <https://www.aiha.org/consultants-directory>.



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